

# Farmers get aid window

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Connecticut's drought-weary dairy farmers are one step closer to becoming eligible for federal compensation money that had previously been denied to them.

On Friday, the U.S. Senate included in its omnibus spending bill language that would allow the state's dairy farmers to apply for aid after a previous deadline had expired.

The spending measure is now in a House-Senate conference, where a final version will be prepared for a vote.

Farmers in the West and Midwest have already been able to apply for compensation from the \$752 million federal Livestock Compensation Program, which was assembled last September to provide aid for farmers hit hard by the drought.

The program gives one-time payments of \$18 a head for beef cattle and \$31.50 a head for dairy cows to help offset the higher feed costs that come with drought.

Initially, Connecticut farmers were left out of the bill

because of the state's farm cycle, which didn't make the full effects of the drought apparent until late in the year. By the time the state applied for the program, it was already past the September 19 deadline.

U.S. Rep. Robert R. Simmons R-2nd District, in whose district many of the state's 214 dairy farms are located, had actively campaigned to secure funds under the program.

Simmons, along with U.S. Rep. Nancy L. Johnson, R-5th District, sent several letters to U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman protesting Connecticut's exclusion from the program.

"There was pressure from multiple sides," Nathan Raab, Simmons' spokesman, said today.

"This was obviously something that was a top priority for the congressman," he said.

In a statement released Friday, Simmons said that Connecticut and Massachusetts farmers deserved the chance to apply after the deadline because of the nature of the farm cycle here. Additionally, Simmons charged that federal officials did not notify the states of the application deadline until it was too late.